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## N.J. family-leave bill to be revived The law would provide six weeks paid. A 10-week plan was rejected.

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State Senate Majority Leader Stephen M. Sweeney plans to renew efforts to enact a paid family-leave law by proposing a measure that would provide up to six weeks off, down from the 10 weeks in a bill that died in the Legislature's last session.

The law would be funded by an estimated \$1 weekly deduction from workers' paychecks and would provide employees with two-thirds of their weekly salary, up to \$500.

Workers could take the leave for the birth or adoption of a child or to care for a sick family member.

Sweeney (D., Gloucester) said employers "won't have to spend a dime" to support the paid-leave fund, but businesses opposed the earlier measure saying it would affect their ability to be flexible with workers' schedules and could cost them money to hire temporary replacements.

Despite nominal support from Democratic leaders, the measure did not come up for a vote in either house before the last session ended Jan. 7.

"Many hard-working folks need support balancing job and family, and this bill provides it," said Jon Shure, president of New Jersey Policy Perspective, a member of the NJ Time to Care Coalition, which is coordinating lobbying efforts on behalf of the bill's passage.

"We think the bill has a good chance to pass in the next few weeks," Shure said.

The bill's measures go beyond the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, passed in 1993, which requires businesses with more than 50 employees to give up to 12 weeks' unpaid leave a year to new parents, sick employees, and those with certain family health emergencies.

The New Jersey measure would allow workers from any size business to take the paid leave. Businesses with fewer than 50 workers, however, would not be required to take an employee back.

Opponents also have argued that a paid family-leave law could make the state less attractive to businesses considering relocating to, or opening facilities in, New Jersey.

But Sweeney said in a statement: "I am confident that this proposal will still give families of working New Jerseyans the comfort and time they need to deal with crises without disarming small businesses of the support they need to thrive."

The new measure provides the same amount of time as does California, which became the first state to approve a paid family-leave law in 2002.

The California program enables workers to collect up to 55 percent of their salaries, capped at \$840 per week.

In April, Washington became the second state to approve paid family leave, but it is limited to care for a newborn or newly adopted child. The law, set to take effect in October 2009, is a whittled-down version of a more comprehensive proposal battled by business.

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